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Laurence R. Horn

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Anymore once more: geographical and syntactic distribution

Laurence R. Horn^{1*}

Abstract

Occurrences of non-polarity *anymore* (NPAM) or so-called “positive anymore” with the approximate meaning of ‘nowadays’ have long been collected by North American dialectologists. The name of the construction is misleading, however, since mainstream *anymore*, as a garden-variety negative polarity item, is acceptable (like *ever* or *anyone*) in a range of grammatically “positive” but downward entailing environments. After touching on the semantic characterization of mainstream and non-polarity *anymore* and the “stigma enigma” presented by the variable social diagnosis of the construction by those familiar and unfamiliar with it, we present the results a study of the grammatical and geographical distribution of non-polarity *anymore*. This study draws on 600 responses to sentences (1)–(5) included in two Amazon Mechanical Turk surveys conducted by the Yale Grammatical Diversity Project in 2019.

- (1) Football is more popular than baseball anymore.
- (2) It’s expensive to fly first-class anymore.
- (3) It’s great to fly first-class anymore.
- (4) Anymore he watches what he eats.
- (5) Anymore he’s spending too much time on Facebook.

Based on these responses, we can expand the geographical range of non-polarity *anymore*, with favorable responses attested in states beyond those explicitly noted by the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, while also providing evidence both for a Pennsylvania core area and for DARE’s “least freq. New England” annotation. Respondents’ preference for (2) over (3) supports the observation by Labov and others that non-polarity *anymore* typically favors negative affect. Also in line with previous claims (e.g. Hindle & Sag 1975), fronting *anymore* as in (4) and (5) lowers median acceptability ratings. The analysis of respondents’ judgments with age as a variable indicates that the acceptability of NPAM is on the decline in the U.S., echoing the parallel apparent change in progress Chambers (2007) reports for his survey of speakers from Ontario’s Golden Horseshoe. We conclude with some remarks on the complementary nature of dialectological methodologies utilizing surveys vs. corpora drawn from Twitter and similar resources.

Keywords

Adverb fronting — Apparent change in progress — Negative affect — Negative polarity items — Positive *anymore* — Socially diagnostic feature

¹ Yale University

*Corresponding author: laurence.horn@yale.edu

In his report of the first survey examining the distribution of *anymore* to be published in *American Speech*, Dunlap (1945) documented the responses of a salient subset of the 250 speakers returning his questionnaire who acknowledged familiarity with the use of *anymore* in what he termed “contexts that are positive, non-interrogative, and non-hypothetical, as in ‘My employer always asks me to do that kind of work anymore.’” Consistent with 16 other, largely anecdotal, reports in *American Speech* dating back to Malone (1931), Dunlap found that this “colloquial idiom” was prevalent in the Middle Atlantic and Midland regions, with Pennsylvania as one geographical focus, while it was more tenuously attested in most of the Southern states and “apparently not in use” in New York City, Long Island, or New England.

Thirty years later, Hindle and Sag (1975) published their own more sophisticated questionnaire-based study on the syntax and semantics of *anymore*, with a focus on the relation of so-called “positive *anymore*” to the mainstream “plain old negative *anymore*” that functions as what would now be termed a medium-strength negative polarity item (NPI). Their paper, first presented at the Second Colloquium on New Ways of Analyzing Variation (NWAV 2) at Georgetown, was a landmark both in its application of the notion of the grammatical continuum or “squish” (cf. e.g. Ross 1972) to a syntactic survey and as an early exemplar of bridge-building between variationist approaches and theoretical linguistics, in the best tradition of the authors’ University of Pennsylvania mentor William Labov. As Hindle and Sag observe (1975:89), speakers in the relevant dialects accept *anymore* not only in canonical negative contexts like (1a) but in the absence of such triggering in (1b) and, for some but not all such speakers, in fronted examples like (1c).

- (1) a. We don’t eat a lot of fish anymore.
- b. % We eat a lot of fish anymore.
- c. % Anymore, we eat a lot of fish.

Even after decades of variationist consciousness-raising, mainstream linguists often continue to neglect this particular variation. The *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Huddleston and Pullum 2002), for example, describes NPI *anymore* in some detail without recognizing that wide swaths of the American English speaking public might find sentences like (1b,c) with non-licensed, so-called “positive *anymore*” fully acceptable.

This paper revisits the landscape of *anymore*, informed by the results of a survey conducted 25 years after Hindle and Sag (1975) and 75 years after Dunlap (1945) for a follow-up characterization of the meaning and distribution of this obstreperous adverb and for a consideration of its relevance for the sociolinguistics of variation. In §1, I present the reasons why the standard but unfortunate label, “positive *anymore*”, has misled linguists and usage as to the nature of the variation in question. In §2 I briefly discuss the semantic relationship between mainstream and dialectally restricted *anymore*. The standard picture of the regional distribution of non-polarity (“positive”) *anymore* is summarized in §3. In §4 I address the question of whether the nonstandard *anymore* of (1b,1c) constitutes a socially stigmatized construction, which turns out to be a more complex matter than it initially appears. §5 presents the results of a recent survey on the acceptability of *anymore* across regions, demographics, syntactic frames, and age groups. I conclude in §6 with some remarks on linguistic change.

1. Grammatical variation: the negatives about “positive *anymore*”

The OED *any more* entry in (2) includes lemmas distinguishing the mainstream (NPI) *anymore* in C.1(a) from its “chiefly Irish English and colloquial North American” doppelgänger in C.1(b).¹ Some of the cites included to illustrate the latter use appear in (2′). Here and below, boldface is added.

(2) OED 3: *Any more*, C, adv.

- 1 a. **In negative, interrogative, or hypothetical contexts:** in continuance of what has taken place up to a particular time; any further, any longer.
- b. **In affirmative contexts:** now, at the present time; from now on. Chiefly *Irish English* and *N. Amer. colloq.*

(2′) cites at OED s.v. *Any more*, C (1)(b)

1898 *Eng. Dial. Dict.* I. 63/1 [Northern Ireland] A servant being instructed how to act, will answer ‘I will do it any more’.

1903 *McClure’s Mag.* Dec. 215/1 **There’s just only this one any more.**

1920 D. H. LAWRENCE *Women in Love* xiii. 167 ‘Quite absurd,’ he said. ‘Suffering bores me, any more.’

1973 *Capital Times* (Madison, Wisconsin) 14 Mar. 2/1 Any more, the difference between a white collar worker and a blue collar worker is simply a matter of shirt preference.

1979 *Whig-Standard* (Kingston, Ontario) 20 Nov. 1/3 **Everything we do anymore** seems to have to be done in a big hurry.

1996 C. I MACAFEE *Conc. Ulster Dict.* 7/1, I think it’ll be fine any more.

The key question is what counts as an “affirmative context” as in (b), as opposed to one that is “negative, interrogative, or hypothetical” as in (a). The latter disjunctive characterization for mainstream *anymore* is not unusual. In his survey, as noted above, Dunlap (1945:13) highlights the regionally restricted use of *anymore* in “contexts that are positive, non-interrogative, and non-hypothetical” (see also Eitner 1991:267), i.e. in the complement of the OED’s set of (a)-type environments. Neither the OED’s nor Dunlap’s and Eitner’s characterizations allow for the fact that NPIs are quite generally licensed in a broader range of environments, as the literature on NPI triggers makes clear, including but not limited to conditional antecedents, comparatives, and the restrictor of universals (Ladusaw 1979, 1996; cf. also Linebarger 1980; Israel 2011; Giannakidou 2011; Horn 2016 among others). But the descriptive situation is actually worse. Dialectological treatments typically distinguish the mainstream (a)-type and restricted (b)-type *anymore* by describing the the latter as occurring in “positive contexts” or environments (Montgomery and Hall 2004, Labov et al. 2006, inter alia).

Or we may find a combination of the two practices, as when the Dictionary of American Regional English begins by describing *anymore* = ‘nowadays’ as occurring “in positive contexts and initially” but then provides the added note:

¹There is an orthographic change in progress distinct from the grammatical one described below. A gradual tendency, stronger in the U.S. than in the U.K., is the rendering of the time adverbial as *anymore* (regardless of the polarity of its context), the practice used here except in quotations of works employing the two-word rendering. (Earlier versions of the OED included *any more* under *more*, but there is now a free-standing entry under *any more*, recognizing the lexical item while retaining the space.) I follow standard current U.S. usage in rendering the time adverbial in *I {don’t/always} eat pizza anymore* as one word with no space, as against the quantity expression in *I don’t want any more pizza*.

In std usage *anymore*, like such words as *any* and *ever*, belongs to the class of ‘non-assertive’ prons and advs, which are restricted to negative, interrogative and hypothetical contexts *and* to non-initial position.

Chambers (2007:36–7) writes of the distribution of mainstream (a)-type *anymore*:

Semantically, the notion of negation in the clause turns out to be more fluid and flexible than many grammarians would like to believe...The gradation of the notion of negation in the clause as indicated by the licensing of *any more* **seems to stretch semantic definitions and goes well beyond the presence of overt negative lexemes.**

Whatever such unnamed grammarians would like to believe, this “stretching” is not unique to polarity *anymore*. It is in fact the well-attested pattern for the licensing of NPIs ranging from *ever*, *much*, or *at all* to minimizers like *sleep a week* or *lift a finger*, where the presence of overt or even implicit negation is not a necessary condition.

MWDEU (Merriam-Webster 1994:106) points to the occurrence of *anymore* “used in contexts with no negative implication, much to the consternation and perplexity of some usage writers”, including—alongside clear (b)-type occurrences like *Everybody’s cool anymore*, uttered by Yankees’ broadcaster Bill White in a 1984 baseball telecast—the examples in (3):²

- (3) a. Every time I even smile at a man any more the papers have me practically married to him. (Betty Grable, quoted in *Time*, 1940)
- b. It sometimes seems to me that all I do anymore is go to funerals. (Harry Truman, quoted in Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking*, 1973)

Similarly, Montgomery and Hall (2004:18) include among their cites for *anymore* “in positive contexts” attested in Smoky Mountain English *Government jobs are about all they have anymore*. But, as observed in Ladusaw (1979) and subsequent work on polarity licensing, occurrence within the restrictor of a universal is a standard property of negative polarity items (NPIs) like *any*, *ever*, or *so much as* as well as *anymore*.³

- (4) a. All the friends I ever had are gone. [—Bob Dylan, “Delia”]
- b. γ All we ever do anymore is {argue/work/fight/have sex/sit around the apartment}.
- c. γ [My workout app] has started crashing every time I so much as look at it.

Truman, born and raised in the heartland state of Missouri, may well have been a “positive *anymore*” speaker, but this can’t be ascertained by the evidence from (3b), which would be a natural utterance for most New Englanders or Californians of a certain age.⁴

NPIs like *any*, *ever*, and minimizers as well as mainstream *anymore* are also widely acceptable within the scope of *only*, however this is to be accounted for. On the analysis in Horn 2002 (see

²The notion of “no negative implication” needs additional unpacking. One of MWDEU’s cites in this category, “*In a way he almost felt sorry for him, any more*”—from the James Jones 1951 classic *From Here to Eternity*—does indeed, unlike the examples in (3), contain a dialectally restricted (b)-type *anymore* (Jones was born and raised in southern Illinois), but it occurs in a context with a “negative implication” in the sense of expressive affect described in §2 below; *He felt proud/happy for him, anymore* would have been less likely.

³As in Horn (2010) and subsequent work, I employ the Google gamma to annotate examples sourced on the internet via Google searches. I use dotted underlining here to highlight NPIs.

⁴The same point applies to the writers and singers of the “hillbilly classic” ditty, “I’m Too Old to Boogie Anymore”, viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgEdF5s61ms>. *Too* (= ‘so much that...not...’) is another standard NPI licenser, despite its lack of negative morphology.

also Horn 2009 and, for a different approach, von Stechow 1999), the positive prejacent of *only*, while entailed (as we see from the impossibility of **Only I can fix it, and (even) I can't*), is not asserted and thus fails to block polarity licensing:

- (5) a. Only young writers ever accept suggestions with any sincerity. (Klima 1964:311)
 b. γ The only time I ever feel good anymore is when I'm on a horse.

Thus the 1903 McClure cite in (2') (*There's only this one any more*) is compatible with ordinary (a)-type NPI *anymore* rather than the regionally restricted (b) "positive" *anymore*.

Similarly, *barely* is not strictly downward entailing in the sense of Ladusaw 1979; you can't barely survive an explosion without surviving it. But the positive polar component of the meaning of *barely*, like the positive prejacent of *only*, is assertorically inert, so that despite the entailment from α *barely* ϕ 'd to α ϕ 'd, the *barely* context readily hosts NPIs:

- (6) She barely {budged/slept a wink/touched a drop/spoke to anyone}. (Horn 2002:56)

It is thus unsurprising to find *barely* hosting *anymore* for mainstream speakers, as in (7):

- (7) I barely go on social media anymore. Just anywhere I go, it's like fantasy [football] has blown up. Everyone knows it's all about fantasy now.
 — David Johnson, NFL running back, 11 Dec. 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/wydg71>

As we have seen, "positive *anymore*" tends to be characterized, even in sophisticated linguistic treatments, without reference to the well-described pattern of NPI licensing in contexts that are not formally negative; such contexts are either ignored or treated via an ad hoc disjunction. This extends even to the masterwork of formal dialectology, the *Atlas of North American English*. Thus consider the valuable map in Figure 1, which shows the distribution obtained in the ANAE surveys for what is (misleadingly) termed "positive *anymore*." (Labov et al. 2006:295, map 21.3)

Note in particular the authors' reference to "positive sentences" like those in (8):

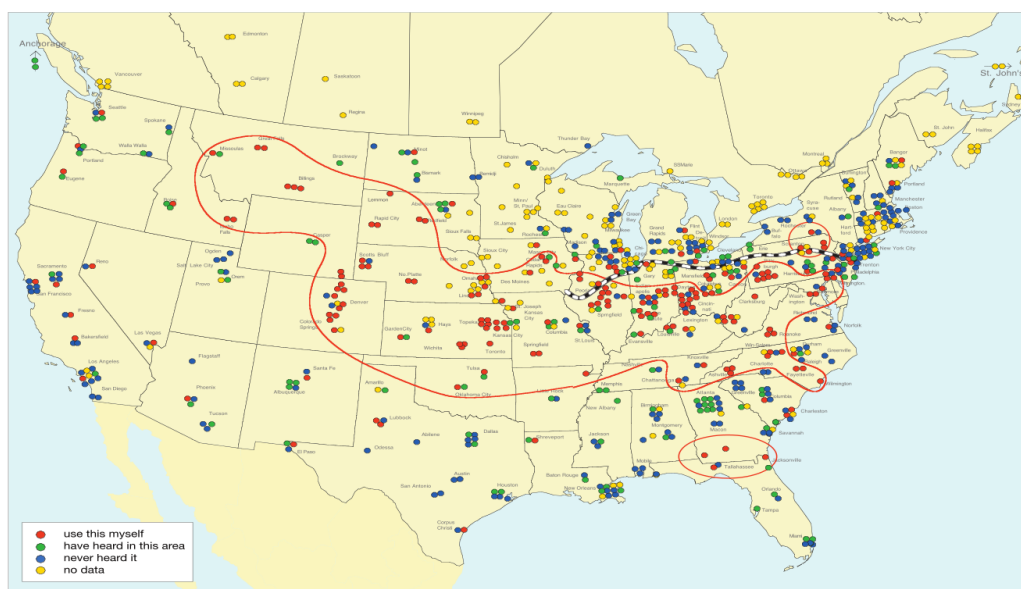
- (8) a. It's real hard to find a good job anymore.
 b. It's hard to do that anymore.

In fact, *anymore* does occur in an NPI-licensing environment here. In the first place, this frame satisfies the standard downward entailment diagnostics for NPI licensing, the availability of a set \rightarrow subset inference (and the absence of any subset \rightarrow set inference):

- (9) a. It's real hard to find a job \rightarrow It's real hard to find a well-paid job.
 b. It's real hard to find a well-paid job \nrightarrow It's real hard to find a job.

Inspection will show that if *hard* is replaced by *easy*, the entailments in (9) reverse direction.

In his treatment of "positive *anymore*", Labov (1973:73–4, 1991:285) claims that (8b) is "out of the question" for mainstream speakers (although he finds it is improved by an intensifier as in (8a)), but this is an exaggeration. Implicitly or morphologically negative adjectives (exemplifying the "inherent" negation of Klima 1964) in this position—*hard*, *difficult*, *tough*, *impossible*—are widely accepted by speakers outside the relevant isogloss, even without intensifying adverbs (see also Hindle and Sag 1975). I have found few speakers in Connecticut who reject (8b), while the same speakers regularly reject the counterpart in which *hard* is replaced by *easy*. Note that other NPIs occur freely in the scope of (*real*) *hard*, where there are no *easy* substitutes:



Map 21.3. Geographic distribution of positive *anymore*

This map charts the use of *anymore* in positive sentences like *It's real hard to find a good job anymore*. This is a well-known pattern of Scots-Irish origin found currently in Northern Ireland. In the U.S., it is reported throughout the Midland

area as originally defined by Kurath, uniting the Upland South with the Midland as defined by ANAE. A concentration of positive *anymore* users is also seen in central New York State and southern Georgia.

Figure 1. Labov et al.'s map for "positive *anymore*"

- (10) a. γ once you get in the oil business, it's real hard to e \ddot{v} er get out.
- b. γ It's hard to e \ddot{v} er tire of #sunset over #Lago #Atitlán
- c. γ For most of us, it's hard to f \grave{a} thom switching phones
- d. γ It's hard to give a dam \grave{u} n when you're this high. [Confession e-card]

It is thus entirely to be expected that NPI *anymore* is widely accepted in (8a,b) but not in e.g. %*In this environment, it's easy to lose your job anymore*, where acceptability truly marks someone as a speaker of the restricted dialect, one who would also accept (1b,c).

There are two morals to be drawn. First, testing for the occurrence of non-polarity *anymore* requires testing for it in a non-NPI-friendly environment, i.e. one in which NPIs like *ever*, *anyone*, and minimizers are ruled out.⁵ And second, we should avoid the standard but misleading moniker for the adverb appearing in (1b,c): rather than the label "positive *anymore*", which implies counterfactually that the phenomenon extends to sentences that many mainstream speakers accept, such as (3), (4), (7), and (8), a more accurate moniker for our quarry is non-polarity *anymore*, henceforth NPAM.

2. The semantics and pragmatics of (N)PAM

Labov (1973:65; 1991:277), for whom *anymore* represents "one of the most interesting and mysterious examples of divergence in English syntax", proposes a split treatment of *anymore* as

⁵As stressed by Hindle and Sag 1975, Labov 1991, and Dalton 2018, inter alia, there is considerable variation as to which environments license NPI *anymore* for mainstream speakers. At the same time, this is a general property of NPI licensing, as described in the literature on polarity (e.g. van der Wouden 1997; Israel 2011; Horn 2016).

a homonymous lexical item reflecting a complex semantic shift. [Hindle and Sag \(1975:89–90\)](#) summarize Labov’s theory as follows:

In Standard English a sentence of the form: ‘I don’t do Y anymore’ presupposes that ‘X used to do Y’. In these ‘positive’ anymore dialects a complex semantic change has taken place creating a new lexical item *anymore*₂, which occurs only in positive sentences. Positive sentences of the form: ‘X does Y anymore’ assert that ‘X didn’t used to do Y.’ Positive *anymore* speakers still have the old *anymore* in negative sentences, i.e. as a polarity alternant of *still*.

But how solid is the ground under the homonymy approach? In response to a query on NPAM sightings in West Virginia including those in (11),

- (11) a. They do everything white folks do any more.
 b. People used to shop a lot in the morning, but any more the crowd comes in about three o’clock.

[Malone \(1931:460\)](#) comments as follows:

The usage in question is as new to me as it was to our correspondent, but the “mystery” is easy to solve. We often use *any more* in the sense ‘now’, but in standard speech this use of the locution always goes with a negative. Thus, we say “he does n’t [sic] do that *any more*,” and mean “he does n’t do that now.” But we should find it odd to hear “he does that *any more*” instead of “he does that now.” In other words, a negative is required if any more is to be used in the sense ‘now’. Evidently in West Virginia (or parts thereof) **this rather artificial rule has been chucked, and any more is used as freely in affirmative as in negative sentences.**

This is in effect the null hypothesis, one which Labov considers (but rejects) as the “pan-dialectal” approach to the distribution of *anymore*. For the speakers in the relevant dialect groups, NPAM is simply an aspectual adverb lacking any NPI licensing requirement. Following [Malone](#) and, far more explicitly, [Hindle and Sag 1975](#), NPAM is neither “an idiom” (notwithstanding the title of [Dunlap 1945](#)), nor a distinct lexical doppelgänger of its NPI homophone. Rather, NPAM has essentially the same semantics as mainstream NPI *anymore*, which (as in [Horn 1970](#))⁶ combines an assertion about the reference time (generally, but not necessarily, equivalent to the time of utterance) with a presupposition of opposite polarity about some prior time. Mainstream *anymore* differs from NPAM in the presence or absence of contextual constraints ([Dunlap](#)’s “rather artificial rule”); cf. [Hindle and Sag 1975:91–92](#); [Dalton 2018](#). Thus, for example, when reference time is “now” (= t_0):

- (12) a. **a doesn’t smoke anymore:** ASSERTS \neg [a smokes at t_0]; PRESUPPOSES [a smoked before t_0]
 b. **a smokes anymore:** ASSERTS [a smokes at t_0]; PRESUPPOSES \neg [a smoked before t_0]

As [Hindle and Sag \(1975\)](#) point out, Labov’s argument that an NPAM sentence like (12b) asserts, rather than presupposes, that a didn’t smoke in the past is not convincing.

⁶While dialectologists and lexicographers have often failed to accurately characterize the conditions on mainstream (NPI) *anymore*, theoretical linguists who do describe NPI *anymore* (e.g. [Horn 1970](#); [Huddleston and Pullum 2002](#)) have often failed even to recognize the existence of NPAM, much less provide an account of its relationship to NPI *anymore*.

Further, beyond the general metatheoretical desideratum to avoid positing homonymy unless necessary (i.e. the “Modified Occam’s Razor” principle of Grice 1989:47)⁷, there are empirical objections to invoking it in the case of *anymore*. Most decisively, as Hindle and Sag (1975:92) point out,

If there were really two different *anymore*’s, one for positive sentences and one for negatives, one would expect that for these speakers a question of the form: ‘Do you eat fish anymore?’ would be ambiguous, for *anymore* also occurs in questions pan-dialectally. We have tested this hypothesis, however, and found no such ambiguity.

Rather than Labov’s two distinct *anymores*, then, Hindle and Sag argue, based on their questionnaire results, for “a unique pan-dialectal *anymore* whose possible environments determine a continuum of *anymore* receptivity, with various speakers differing simply on how picky they are about the receptiveness of an environment.” The “divergence in English syntax” cited by Labov would be understood as the graduated loss of polarity sensitivity, also attested with *anyway*, *anyhow*, and in some dialects with NPIs like *at all* (Hindle and Sag 1975:107–8).

Additional evidence against the ambiguity of *anymore* are marshalled by Hindle and Sag, while it is defended by Youmans (1986) and Chambers (2007); see Dalton 2018 for additional considerations. I will not resolve this issue here, except to note another possible approach. Rather than invoking ambiguity or homonymy as on Labov’s account, which would implausibly treat the close semantic relations between the NPI *anymore* of (12a) and the NPAM of (12b) as an accident, we might consider the two values of the adverb to constitute an instance of polysemy between different but related senses of the same lexical item. In this way, we would be assimilating the pattern of *anymore* to those of other quantifiers and adverbs, ranging from *until* (NPI vs. durative: see Israel 2011), *ever* (NPI vs. universal; see Israel 1998, 2011; Horn 2000), *any* (NPI vs. free-choice; see Kadmon and Landman 1993; Lee and Horn 1994; Horn 2000; Israel 2011). The same patterns have been observed in other languages, as with Dutch *ooit* (‘once’, ‘ever’; see Hoeksema 1998).⁸

While differing on the semantic analysis of polarity and non-polarity *anymore*, scholars have tended to agree on a pragmatic feature of NPAM. Even in the absence of a negative or downward-entailing licenser, there appears to be a persistent correlation of NPAM with negative affect. That is, the change of state or reversal of eventuality codified in (12b) is generally an undesirable one. Youmans (1986:73, citing Labov, p.c.) cites the tendency for NPAM to “imply a negative attitude toward the state of affairs reported” (cf. Horn 2014:338–9; Strelluf 2019:329). To take a random example, a male 58-year-old Nevadan cited by De Jong (2018) complains “Movies are so violent anymore.” It would have been less likely (but not impossible) for such a speaker, if favorably impressed with recent cinematic trends, to express his enthusiasm with the statement “Movies are so exciting anymore.” Labov et al. (2006:294) add a regional variable to this tendency: “In

⁷See also Kripke (1977:20): “Do not posit an ambiguity unless you are forced to, unless there are really compelling theoretical or intuitive grounds to suppose that an ambiguity really is present.”

⁸It is worth noting that the free choice reading of *any* as in *Anyone can win* is limited to determiners while blocked from adverbial *any* (roughly = ‘at all’: Horn 2000:99–101; cf. also De Jong 2018):

- (i) This {doesn’t/*could/*may} help us any.
- (ii) Things {couldn’t/*could} be any better.

Thus the loss of the polarity feature on the adverb *anymore* for NPAM speakers appears to be unrelated to the availability of non-polarity free-choice readings for the determiner *any*.

the eastern part of its range, positive *anymore* appears to be associated with the speech act of *complaint*.”

But as the same sources recognize, this preference for NPAM to mark attitudes of complaint, regret, or resignation is far from absolute; the literature readily provides both positive-affect and evaluatively neutral occurrences, as do examples from the DARE entry and the Twitter data gathered by Strelluf (2019) from largely Midwestern cities, as sampled in (13):

- (13) a. We use a gas stove anymore.
b. We put up quite a bit of hay here anymore.
c. I enjoy my own company anymore.
d. 3 nurses on night shift seems to be the norm anymore ☹

What is lacking is empirical evidence in the form of speaker reactions to minimal pairs of negative vs. positive/neutral NPAM sentences, a gap that our study, reported on in §5 below, seeks to rectify.

3. Regional variation: the standard story

We return to the primary question on NPAM raised by Dunlap (1945) and other contributors to the squibs and papers in *American Speech*—where in North American English is NPAM found?—along with the related underlying question—where did it come from? In the standard origin story, the non-polarity *anymore* of Appalachian English and other varieties of North American English is typically attributed to Scots-Irish influence (Wolfram and Christian 1976; Murray 1993; Montgomery 1995). To be sure, unlicensed occurrences of *anymore* (or more precisely *any more*) are attested in Scotland from the 17th century onward but some scholars (e.g. Chambers 2007, De Jong 2018) are skeptical of a direct link, citing the disparities between North American distribution patterns and the semantic value of Ulster *anymore*. As in the first OED cite under (2') above, the Ulster servant promising to reform by pledging “I will do it any more”, the usual occurrence of Scottish and Scots-Irish *anymore* is “prospective” or future-oriented (De Jong 2018), suggesting a non-polarity paraphrase like *henceforth* (or *soon*, following Chambers and Trudgill 1991a) rather than *nowadays* (plus the usual (12b)-type opposite-polarity presupposition). But not every instance of NPAM in the British Isles can be confined to Scotland or Ulster, nor is every instance prospective. Consider the much-cited declaration of D. H. Lawrence’s Birkin, who (like Lawrence himself) hails from the English Midlands and who nevertheless declares “Suffering bores me, any more” (see (2') again).

Wolfram and Schilling (2016) ascribe “positive *anymore*” to the “Founder effect”, the durable imprint of Ulster Scots settlers who brought NPAM with them to the U. S. Midland and Appalachian dialect regions. They depict the distribution as running through the mountain South, while (as also noted by Dunlap) the feature is rare in Northern and Southern dialect areas not influenced by Scots-Irish settlement. In their analysis, it constitutes a group-exclusive feature, one not present in speech of all members of the relevant groups but predictably absent from non-members. Most other sources on American English similarly associate NPAM with the Midwest (North and South Midland) and Appalachia; various *American Speech* papers and notes dating from Malone 1931 to Dunlap 1945 and beyond offer cites from West Virginia, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, southern Ontario, and a variety of Midwestern states. The surveys of Murray 1993, Labov et al. 2006 (see Figure 1), and Reynolds (2013) support this view, as does DARE’s entry (Cassidy and Hall 1985; <https://tinyurl.com/yy2anyte>), which includes a map that largely confirms Dunlap’s findings, adding the note “scattered, but least freq New England”.

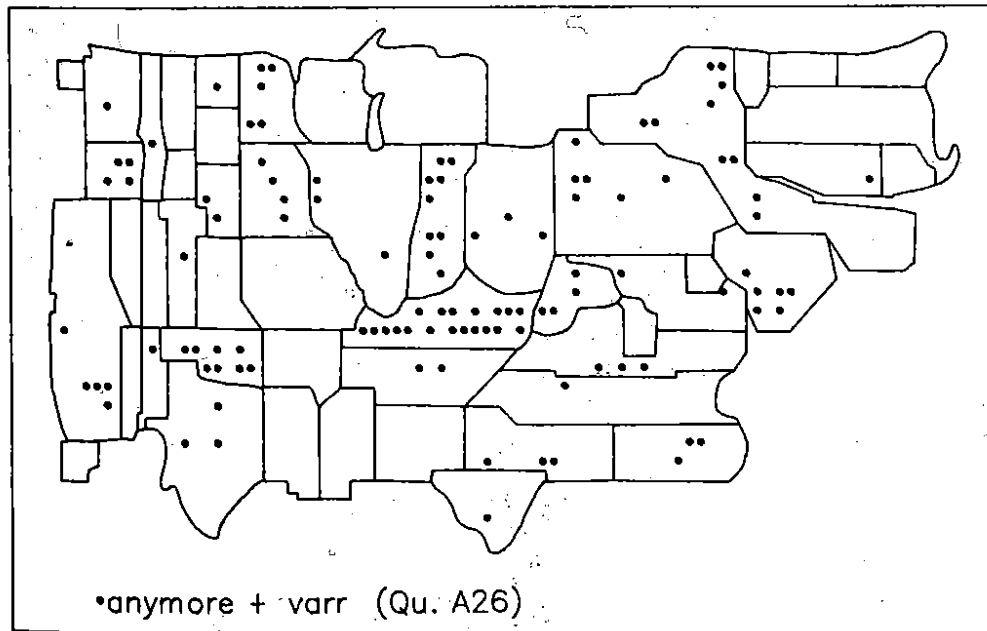


Figure 2. *Dictionary of American Regional English*, 1.73, s.v. *anymore*

Note, however, the absence of attestations in this map for states where NPAM has been situated in other work (cf. Dunlap 1945, Labov et al. 2006 as indicated in Figure 1), states ranging from Wisconsin and Michigan in the north and Iowa and Kansas in the Midland to Delaware in the east and Arkansas in the southwest. In §6 we turn to the findings of our surveys on the distribution of this construction, after first touching on the question of the social value adhering to the NPAM construction.

4. Social variation: the stigma enigma

It is often observed by dialectologists that speakers who are familiar with and regularly use NPAM do not regard the construction as “a socially diagnostic linguistic feature” possessing “sociological significance” (Wolfram and Christian 1976:103; Murray 1993:183), much less as a stigmatized marker. Indeed, non-polarity *anymore*, far from being a shibboleth consciously associated with a particular dialect group, is a kind of stealth marker. In literary contexts, it is often inadvertently smuggled into utterances unlikely to have been uttered by the speaker credited with uttering it. Thus, for example, the characters in Richard Russo’s 2001 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Empire Falls* are all from Maine (well outside the isogloss), but Russo himself is from NPAM-attesting upstate New York, which explains why his characters tend to say (or think) clauses with unlicensed *anymore*, sometimes with its telltale fronting:

She put the three cushions down on seats only a third of the way up the bleachers because **anymore** her feet always hurt from standing all day.

Anymore, all he wanted to do was jack off to the porn he downloaded off the internet.

Similarly, Pulitzer Prize winning author Richard Ford's 2002 story "Abyss" is set in New Jersey, but Ford himself grew up in Arkansas and Mississippi and attended Michigan State University, both NPAM domains, whence:

His father always said it didn't matter who knew what you did, only *what* you did.
And what they'd been doing was fucking and riding around in a rental car on company time—which was probably a federal crime **anymore**.

It will be noticed that Russo's and Ford's *anymores*, while not negative polarity occurrences, are nevertheless **emotively** negative, conveying an expression of regret at the change of state involved. As we noted in §3, this is a characteristic (though not inevitable) feature of NPAM.

But while NPAM may not be a stigmatized construction (as opposed, for example, to negative concord) and often not even recognized as a variable feature within the areas of its prevalence, those outside the isogloss show no such compunction. Indeed, for such outlanders NPAM is not only typically misinterpreted as marking a continuance the past state of affairs (= 'still') rather than as an alteration of that situation (= 'nowadays') (see Labov 1973), but often ridiculed by those made aware of its existence, including the proscriptive guardians at the gate.

After syndicated journalist Bob Greene, who hails from Ohio and Illinois, lamented in a 1975 *Newsweek* column that "We are so cool and so hard and so hip any more that there has grown a large dead spot inside us all," Greene's editors—taken aback by what they saw as his "extension of the meaning of *any more*"—snatched on him to the *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* panel, inviting the panel to evaluate this "new or semi-dialect sense" of the adverb. The HDCU panelists, comprising 166 "distinguished experts in the field of the English language," condemned Greene's use of *anymore* with virtual unanimity across two editions (1975; 1985) as "barbaric patois" (John Ciardi), "uneducated" (Isaac Asimov), "nonce slang" (Willard Espy), "a barbarism" (Red Smith), and similar variations on this theme: "nonsensical", "confusing", "illogical", "unsure immigrant speech", "illiterate and without meaning", "faintly nauseating", "lower class", "silly and probably a boner" (Morris and Morris 1975, 1985).

The "barbarism" epithet is particularly telling. This term, directed at acts and customs perceived to display ignorance or crudity or more specifically at "the use of words or expressions not in accordance with the classical standard of a language" (OED), derives via Latin *barbarismus* 'the use of a foreign tongue or the incorrect use of one's own'. The ultimate source is the Greek noun *barbarismos* 'foreign mode of speech' and adjective *barbaros* 'foreign, non-Greek', of onomatopoeic origin: "*bar-bar-bar*", essentially connoting 'It's non-Greek to me.' The trajectory is 'foreign, different (from us)' > 'hard (for us) to understand' > 'wrong'—or worse: cf. *barbaric*, *barbarous*, *barbarity*. John Ciardi and Red Smith are thus perpetuating a long, if not particularly distinguished, tradition of cultural commentary.

William and Mary Morris (1975) introduce the HDCU "*any more*" entry with the remark that NPAM represents a "new" usage, "heard with increasing frequency, especially in the speech of young people", a claim echoed by some of their certified experts. ("Any way to head it off?" one wistfully wonders.) Similarly, Follett's *Modern American Usage* (1998:35) sees NPAM as an unfortunate innovation found among "the young in particular"—and "wrong": "Once a law-abiding word, *anymore* now keeps bad company", employed there by speakers who fail to realize that "its rightful place is in negative statements and in questions." But as actual non-pontificating work in both lexicography and dialectology indicates, the view that NPAM represents an innovation is unfounded. The supposition (or hope) by other HDCU panelists that the construction "may be disappearing" or "dying out" is harder to evaluate; we will return to this question below.

The general tendency for speakers who happen to be unfamiliar with a given construction to proscribe that construction as “wrong”, “illogical”, or even “barbarian” is an inclination toward xenophobia exacerbated (if not actually caused) by negative attitudes toward those whose dialects include the construction in question, applied in particular (but not limited) to speakers of African American or Appalachian English. Besides NPAM, another example is the non-reflexive subject-reinforcing personal dative (*I need me a new pickup truck*; cf. Christian 1991, Horn 2008, <https://ygdpc.yale.edu/phenomena/personal-datives>). Here again, the grammatical stigma is a metonymic stand-in for prejudice toward individuals or social groups, in this case “rednecks” or “hicks” (see Horn 2014:335–7).

Besides being viewed as incorrect or ungrammatical, unfamiliar syntactic constructions like NPAM often fall victim to what Arnold Zwicky dubs the recency illusion (Zwicky 2005).⁹ This is the false impression that some observed phenomenon one has just discovered—in particular a given linguistic construction, or a meaning associated with a given expression—is of recent origin, when it has in fact been extant for years, decades, or centuries. As Zwicky points out,

This is a selective attention effect. Your impressions are simply not to be trusted; you have to check the facts. Again and again—retro *not*, double *is*, speaker-oriented *hopefully*, split infinitives, etc.—the phenomena turn out to have been around, with some frequency, for very much longer than you think. It’s not just Kids These Days.

Additional examples involve the sex-neutral singular use of *they*, the conjoined nominative in *between you and I*, or on the lexical side the use of *nice* to mean ‘pleasant’ or *aggravate* to mean ‘annoy’, each of which, though disparaged by late 20th or early 21st century usage mavens as deplorable recent innovations, can be shown to have existed for 200 years or more. In our own domain, that of grammatical variants, usage experts continue to excoriate the appearance of unlicensed *anymore*, personal datives, or multiple modals (see <http://www.ygdpc.yale.edu> for other examples) as portending the death of the English language, the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of its speakers, or both. But the horses of linguistic change have already galloped off by the time the barn door of prescriptive “correctness” has been ordered shut.

As we have noted, constructions like NPAM may be non-stigmatized within their home speech community but mocked by mainstream speakers; the speech of devalued outlanders is ipso facto outlandish. At the same time, there may be domains in which covert prestige (Trudgill 1972) is assigned to such constructions, increasing the likelihood of its use even outside its normal regional range. In particular, within the community of practice of athletes and sports commentators, the occurrence of NPAM flourishes in happy profusion. My own compilation of attested instances includes *He’s a guess hitter anymore*; *Most new parks anymore are hitters’ parks*; *It’s such a fine line anymore* [between winning and losing]; *Three DBs* [defensive backs on a given play] *is almost a given in this league anymore*; *Anymore in college football the quarterback is always looking over to the sidelines*.¹⁰ That being said, it is undoubtedly the case that ceteris paribus the main predictive factor for the occurrence of NPAM is geography. I now revisit this issue with the assistance of crowd-sourcing technology.

⁹As MWDEU (s.v. *anymore*; Merriam-Webster 1994:106) points out, “Although many who encounter the usage for the first time think it is new, it is not: the earliest attestation cited in the DARE is dated 1859.”

¹⁰As Dennis Preston observes (p.c.), characteristic features of Southern speech—including NPAM, multiple modals, and vowel patterns—are often exhibited in the speech of Army sergeants, even in New England.

5. Regional variation: new empirical evidence for the distribution of NPAM

With the goal of ascertaining the current regional distribution of *anymore* in environments without negation or another NPI licenser, the Yale Grammatical Diversity Project included the sentences in (14–18) on two surveys conducted with Amazon Mechanical Turk in the spring and fall of 2019. Our goal, as always, was to study variation among speakers at an individual level, to examine the behavior of regional and social variables, and to seek robust correlations.¹¹

- (14) Football is more popular than baseball anymore.
- (15) It's expensive to fly first-class anymore.
- (16) It's great to fly first-class anymore.
- (17) Anymore he's spending too much time on Facebook.
- (18) Anymore he watches what he eats.

More specifically, we sought to determine how the results from our survey compared to those of the standard extant research on NPAM, controlling for negative vs. positive affect and fronting vs. non-fronting of the adverb, as well as for age, gender, race, and income level of the 899 respondents. As is our standard procedure, we surveyed speakers who had spent at least 8 years residency in situ as a child. Judgments were given on a scale of 1 (“totally unacceptable, even in informal settings”) to 5 (“totally acceptable”). We utilize ArcGIS Pro software and both hot/cold spot analyses (see Figure 3) and inverse-distance weighted interpolation maps (Power = 0.5, 24 nearest points, mean with a radius of 50 km). Figure 3, taken from Wood et al. (2020b:197), shows individual positive responses (4 or 5) in black, negative responses (1 or 2) in white for sentence (14), an NPAM structure with no obvious affect marking or fronting. For accessibility, the results are smoothed in the interpolation map in Figure 4 and subsequent figures; areas of acceptance and rejection appear in green and purple respectively.

The contrast between (15) and (16) explores the evaluative dimension by testing respondents' reactions to negative affect (*expensive*) vs. positive affect (*great*) in NPAM sentences. The results of our studies, displayed in Figures 5 and 6, indicates the strong preference of respondents for the former context.

¹¹For more on the theoretical and empirical background, see Zanuttini et al. 2018:§3 and <http://www.ygdp.yale.edu> for details on the project and methodology used in collecting and displaying data. Other studies emanating from the project include Wood et al. 2015; Wood and Zanuttini 2018; Wood et al. 2020a,b.

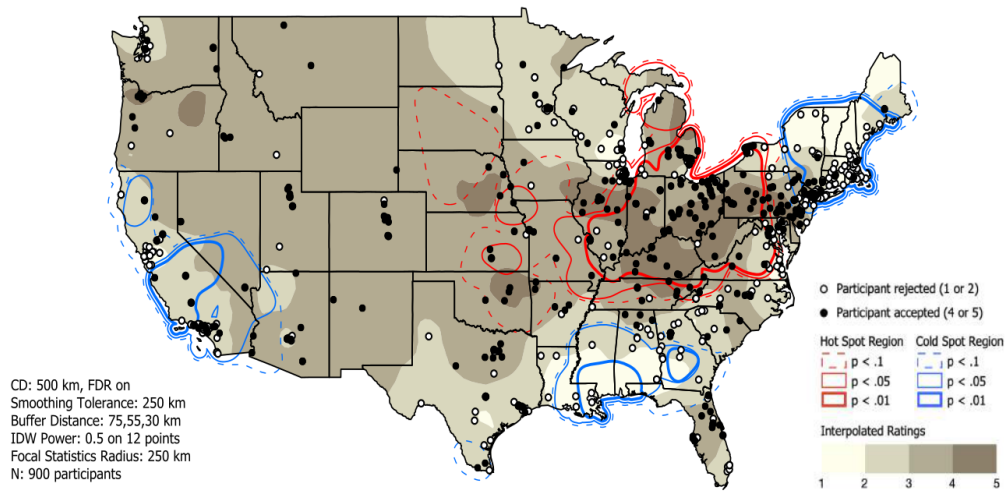


Figure 3. “Football is more popular than baseball anymore”

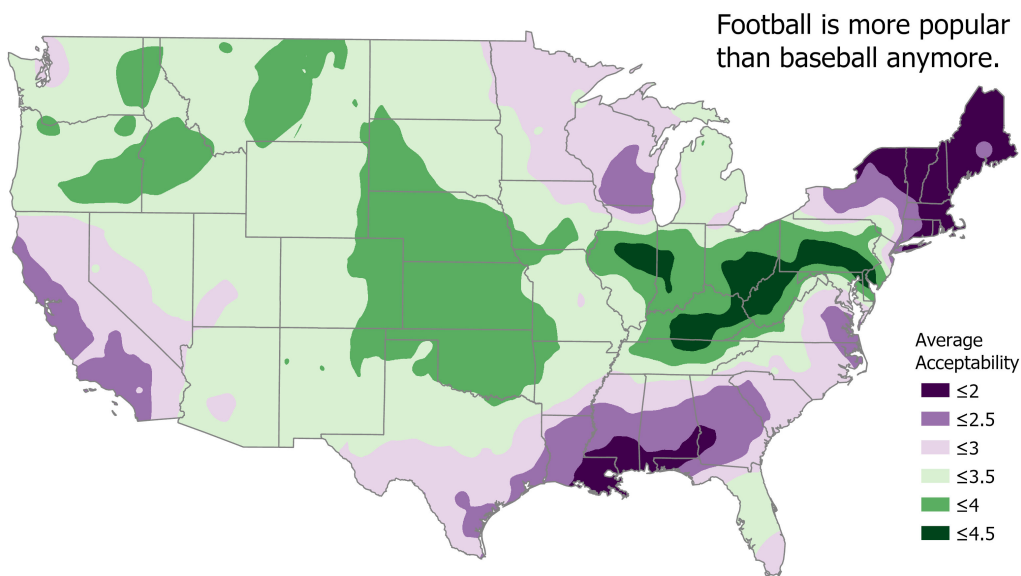


Figure 4. “Football is more popular than baseball anymore” (interpolation)

The contrast between (17) and (18) also involves negative vs. positive affect (*too much time; watches what he eats*), but at the same time explores the role of fronting, by allowing the comparison of responses to these sentences with the non-fronted examples (14–16).

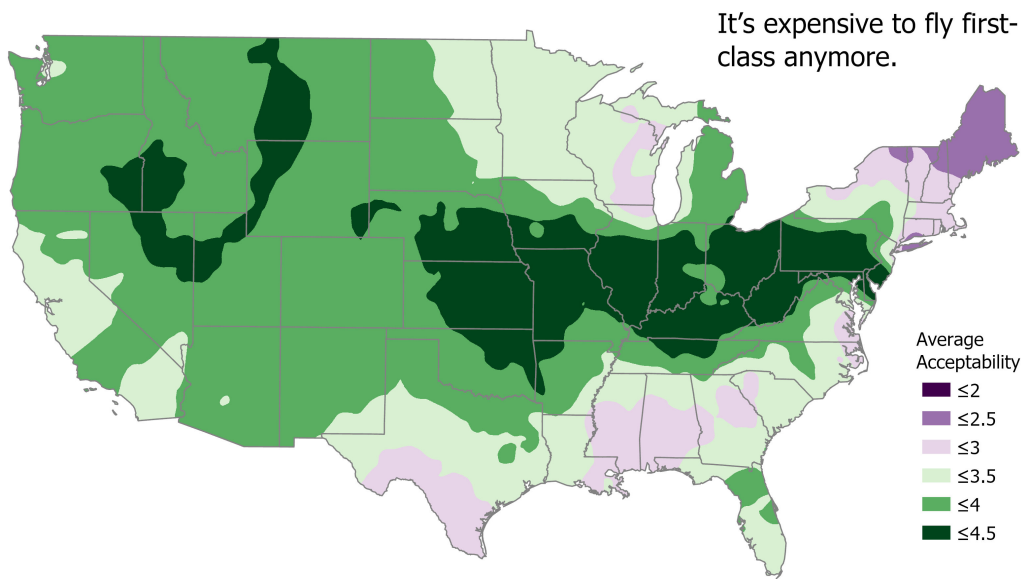


Figure 5. "It's expensive to fly first-class anymore"

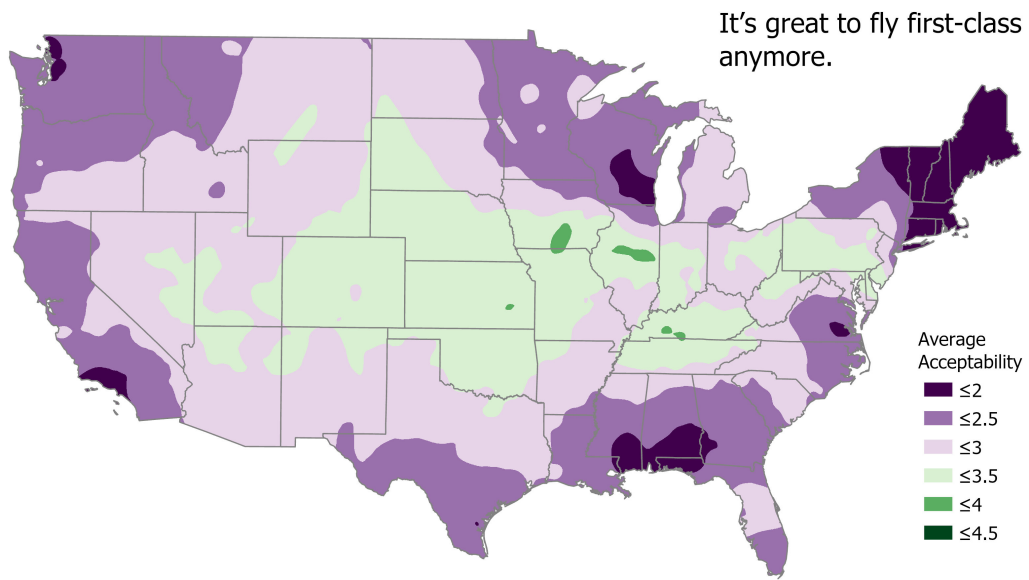


Figure 6. "It's great to fly first-class anymore"

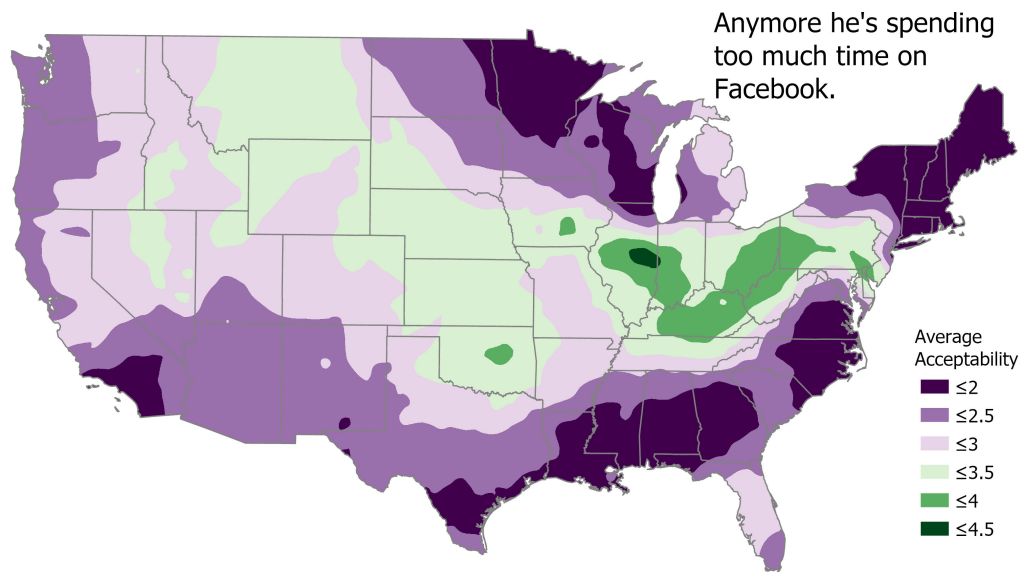


Figure 7. “Anymore he’s spending too much time on Facebook”

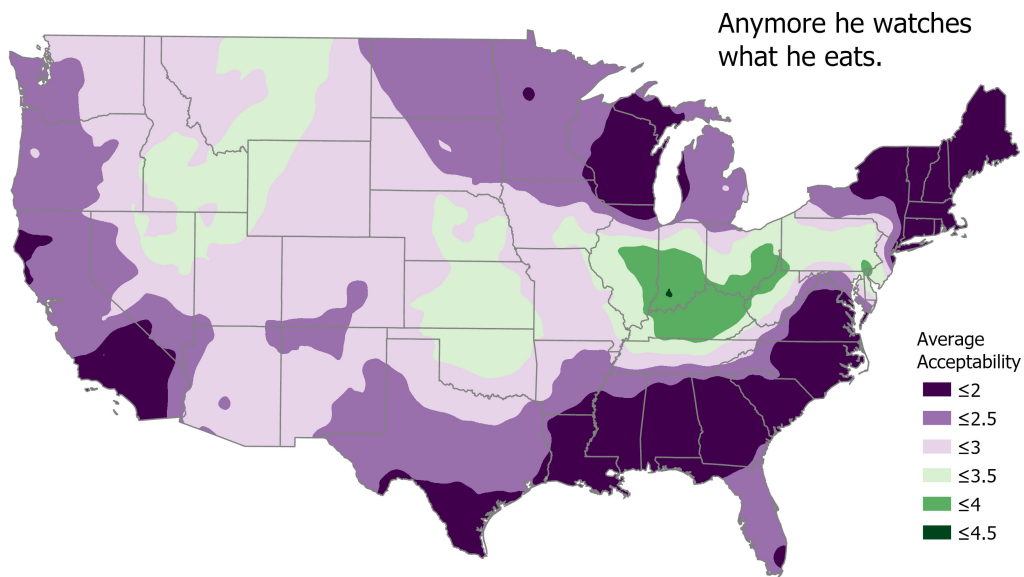


Figure 8. “Anymore he watches what he eats”

The remaining figures address the role of respondent’s age as a variable. The question we seek to address is whether NPAM is on the rise or on the wane. The displays in Figures 9–14 indicate the responses of speakers in five different age groups averaged across all the NPAM sentences tested; Figure 9 establishes a baseline for average acceptability across age groups.

Anymore once more: geographical and syntactic distribution — 17/25

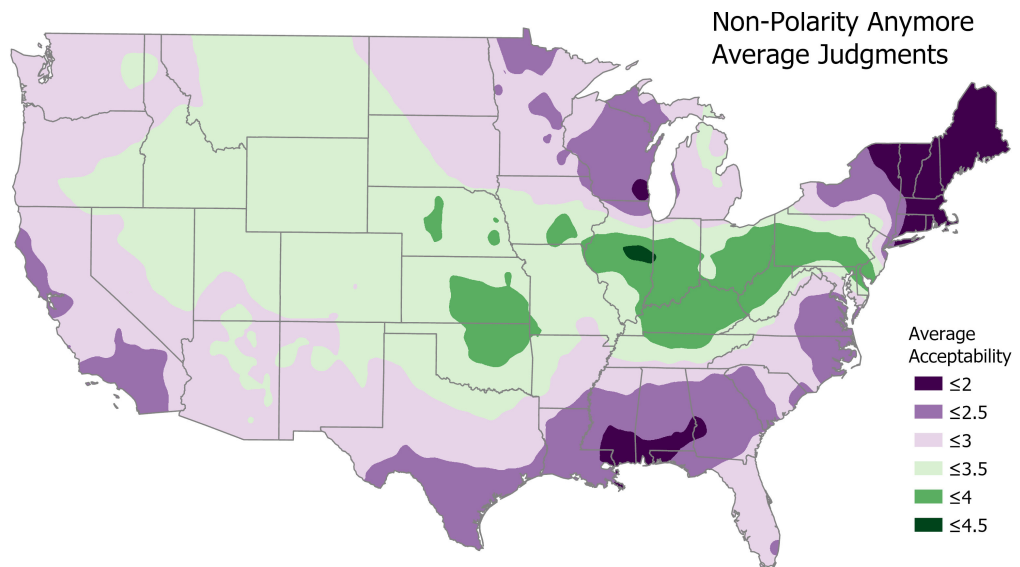


Figure 9. average acceptability of NPAM sentences (14–18)

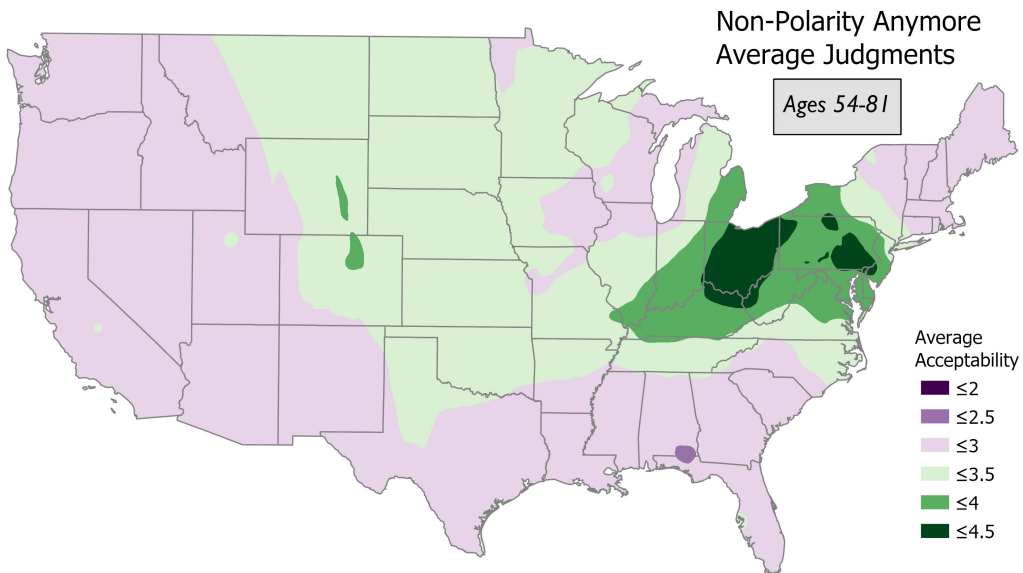


Figure 10. average acceptability of NPAM sentences (14–18) for 54–81 age group

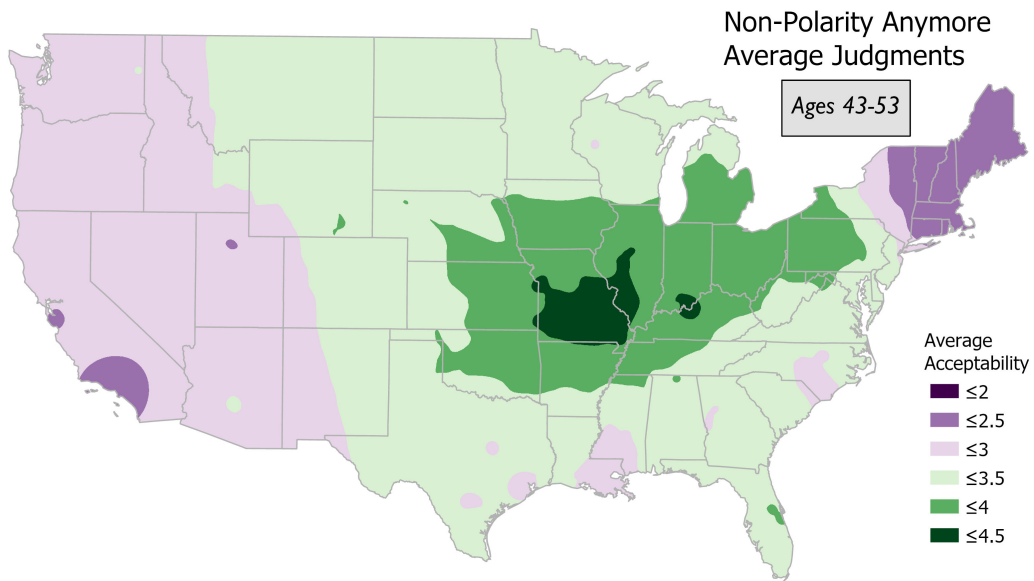


Figure 11. average acceptability of NPAM sentences (14–18) for 43–53 age group

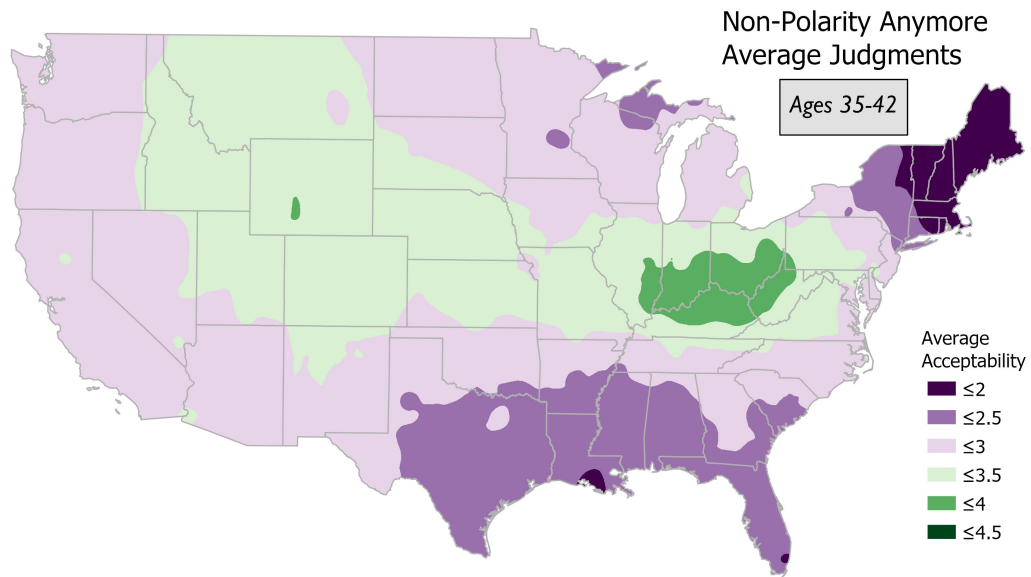


Figure 12. average acceptability of NPAM sentences (14–18) for age 35–42 group

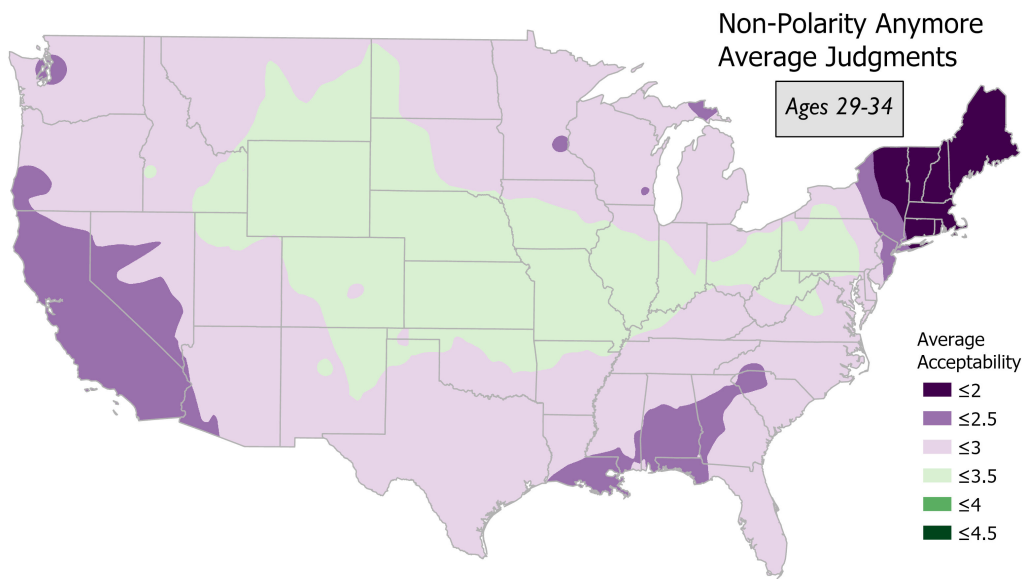


Figure 13. average acceptability of NPAM sentences (14–18) for 29–34 age group

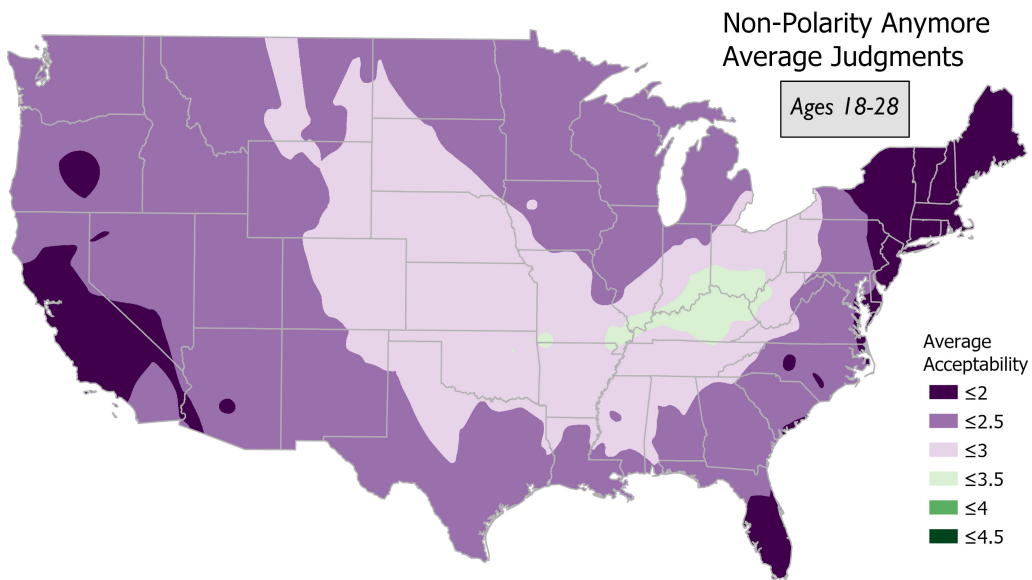


Figure 14. average acceptability of NPAM sentences (14–18) for 18–28 age group

The gradual decline in NPAM acceptability as we move from the oldest to the youngest age group of respondents stands proxy for an apparent change in progress. For another perspective on this shift, consider the bar graph in Figure 15, where a slightly different breakdown of age cohorts is displayed.

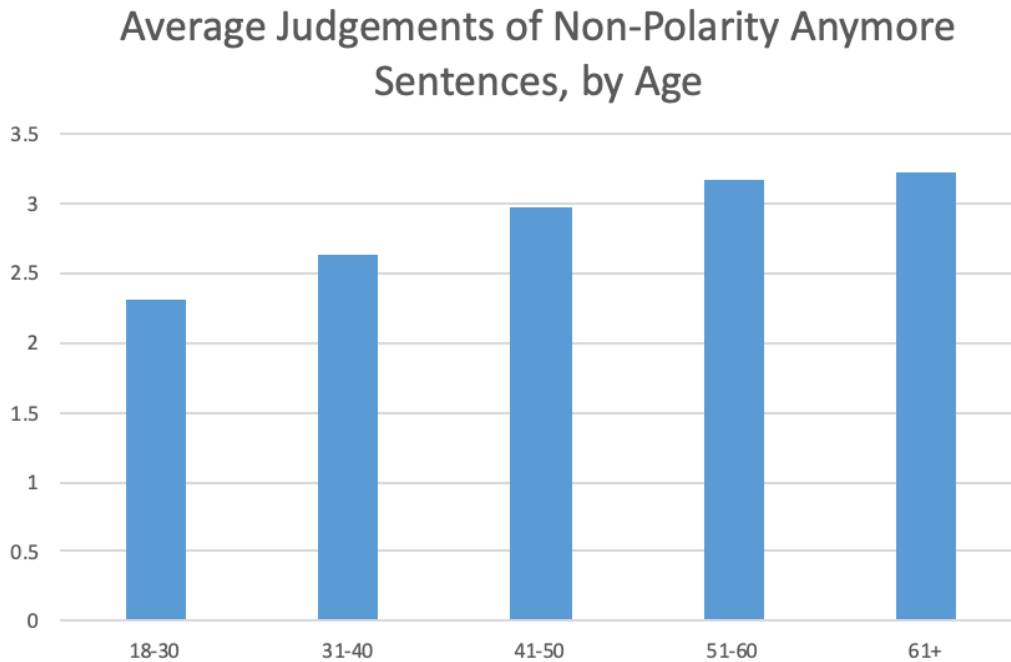


Figure 15. NPAM acceptability varies by speaker age

6. Results and conclusions

The results of our surveys confirm two frequently observed properties of NPAM:

- (i) The acceptability of non-polarity *anymore* significantly improves in contexts expressing a negative affect or attitude;
- (ii) The acceptability of non-polarity *anymore* is significantly degraded when the adverb is fronted.

In addition, our findings suggest that speakers from urban areas—those from towns and cities with population $\geq 50,000$ —tend to be less likely to accept NPAM (average judgment 2.66) than are non-urban speakers—those from towns with population $< 50,000$ (average judgment 3.04). More data would be needed to confirm the significance of this disparity.

No significant splits were found by gender, and while the breakdown of results by race does not permit any significant generalizations, it would be worth conducting follow-up empirical work to determine the accuracy of anecdotal reports that white speakers are more likely to accept NPAM than Black speakers within the same geographical area (Strelluf 2019). One piece of indirect

evidence for this conclusion is the fact that the results of the Twitter corpus reported on by Strelluf (2019) indicates that among Midland respondents, Twitter users in St. Louis are less likely to use NPAM in their tweets than those in cities to their east (Indianapolis, Columbus, Pittsburgh) or west (Kansas City). It is plausible to attribute this difference to the fact that St. Louis has a higher proportion of Black speakers—and one can assume Black Twitter users—than the other four cities. Obtaining direct evidence for or against such a racial differential in NPAM acceptability would be a useful next step; unfortunately, while Black speakers are if anything overrepresented in Twitter use,¹² they are underrepresented in the pool of respondents to Mechanical Turk surveys on linguistic variation, making it difficult to achieve an adequate sample size. As Wood et al. (2020a:6) concede, “[N]on-white speakers in general, and Black speakers in particular, have traditionally been sorely underrepresented in large-scale projects in American regional dialect variation, and the current project continues this unfortunate trend.”

The fact that our survey findings largely (but not completely) support earlier findings from traditional dialectology lends credence to the Mechanical Turk methodology we employ. Geographically, our results support a somewhat expanded picture of *anymore* acceptability with positive responses attested in areas not so marked on the DARE map (Wisconsin, Michigan, Montana, South Dakota), while also reinforcing the “less freq. New England” annotation. In general, however, NPAM acceptability correlates roughly with the acceptability of Appalachian constructions like personal datives, *needs washed*, and *come with*, while also patterning with the rejection of northeastern-based phenomena like *so don’t I* and *done my homework*. (See <https://ygd.p.yale.edu/phenomena> for more on the grammar and distribution of these constructions.)

Strelluf’s (2019) research on non-polarity *anymore* utilizes a corpus of Twitter postings in Midland cities falling within consensus NPAM country (Pittsburgh, Columbus, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Kansas City) as against non-Midland cities (Chicago, Birmingham, San Francisco), an approach complementary to that described here. Each methodology offers a contribution the other cannot. While Strelluf’s study consists of actual occurrences of non-polarity *anymore* in a written, colloquial register, production data cannot provide feedback on unacceptable sentences; if a given tweet fails to include *anymore* in a tweet within a given syntactic frame, we can’t infer why. This is where surveys come in, whether those employing traditional questionnaires (Dunlap 1945; Hindle and Sag 1975; Murray 1993; Cassidy and Hall 1985) or Mechanical Turk-style crowdsourcing as in the current study.

The principal remaining issue relates to whether NPAM is waxing or waning among its speakers. As we have seen, some HCDU panelists depict NPAM as an unfortunate fad of the young, while others speculate (or hope) that it may be in decline. Hindle and Sag (1975:109) see the phenomenon as one on the rise:

We have as yet no direct evidence that *anymore* is presently undergoing change...But given the history of the other *any*-words [= *anyway*, *anyhow*], we have here a rare opportunity for predictive historical linguistics: our grandchildren or great-grandchildren, whether they grow up in the Mid-west or not, will probably be unconstrained *anymore* speakers.

Our evidence, as seen in §5, and in particular in the data displayed in Figures 9–14, points in the opposite direction. In this respect, our findings for U.S. respondents dovetail with those reported by Chambers (2007) based on his survey of speakers in the Golden Horseshoe, the area of

¹²Yu (2013) estimates that 26% of Black internet users are on Twitter, compared to 14% of white internet users.

southern Ontario semi-circling around the western half of Lake Ontario. Chambers mourns the “depressing” result that “positive *any more*”, i.e. our NPAM, after having been imported into the region in the 18th century by immigrants from Pennsylvania and thriving for 200 hundred years, is now fading away. He demonstrates a linear decline in acceptability as we move from speakers of sixty and over to those in their twenties, betokening the end of NPAM:

The apparent time evidence...shows quite clearly that its day is done. Positive *any more* is a relic any more, that is, nowadays. The traces of it that we found in the Golden Horseshoe survey were, in effect, its fossilized remains.

(Chambers 2007:42)

Without longitudinal studies, we can't be sure that the inverse correlation between acceptability of NPAM and speaker age emerging from our results for U.S. English and from those Chambers attested 12 years earlier for Ontario English, represents a true change in progress and not age-graded variation. It is possible (although unlikely) that the NPAM-averse Millennials or Generation Z speakers of today will acknowledge 40 years from now: “*I never used to accept those kinds of sentences, but anymore I think they're just fine.*”

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